

ABSTRACT

Thesis: GENDER NORMS AND TABOOS AS MANIFESTED IN DICHOTOMIES OF SPACE.

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Dichotomies are a way we simplify interconnected hierarchical complexities of race, class, ethnicity, gender and power plays in our society. The division between male and female has been the primary dichotomy I have focused on in this discussion. My argument is that dichotomies create a cyclical loop which reinforces social injustice between genders in societies cross culturally and across time. This cycle of gender division includes cultural, built and activity patterns. There is no single point of origin of these patterns, but rather a constant loop of reinforcement from one pattern to the other.

What I am trying to do here is not judge or criticize these societies and their values; rather I am evaluating them comparatively with other societies based on the status of women. I have found these cultural, built and activity patterns by documenting examples that exist cross culturally and across time. In order to do this I had to set up some criteria for selecting my case studies. I have divided the examples into four categories:

1. Egalitarian subsistence societies having equal status for women with respect to men and other women in similar cultures.
2. Hierarchical societies having lower status of women with respect to men and other women in a similar culture.
3. 19th and 20th century case studies in urban societies having lower status of women with respect to men.
4. 19th and 20th century case studies in reforms and utopian proposals that aimed at making egalitarian societies with equal status among men and women.

I found that the public/private cultural pattern was the most recurring pattern. It is present in egalitarian, hierarchical and 19th and 20th century Victorian society. This pattern exists cross-culturally and across time. In the egalitarian subsistence societies, dichotomies are not understood as a set of oppositions such as superior and inferior. Their belief in harmony and balance in nature emphasized equality, unlike the hierarchical societies. In hierarchical subsistence societies, dichotomies divided people by assigning them public or private roles.

In 19th and 20th century Victorian society an ideal gentleman was supposed to have serious, dignified, chivalrous qualities and an ideal lady was supposed to be moral, beautiful, cheerful and elegant. This shows that the cultural patterns were enforced upon individuals and they had to act accordingly in the society.

I also looked at the utopian solutions of making childcare, laundry, and food preparation community activities. These radical solutions were focused on improving the cultural, built and activity patterns simultaneously.

I have evaluated these case studies comparatively based on the status of women.

While it's difficult to state a solution to accommodate the layers of gender segregation that exist within cultural, built and activity patterns, I don't think proposing an overtly radical solution is the right direction either.

I would strongly recommend more awareness of feminist education in architecture and engineering schools. There should be more incentives and scholarships for women in traditionally male dominated professions like architecture and engineering. Learning about these patterns of gender segregation in different societies is also a way to begin this cultural progress.